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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: USAID/OFDA Darfur Agriculture and Food Security Assessment

REF: A) KHARTOUM 1156

¶1. (U) Summary: The 2009 harvest outlook in Darfur is mixed. Reports from most of West Darfur indicated reliable rains, while parts of South and North Darfur did not. In addition to general agricultural development challenges, lack of humanitarian access and insecurity continue to render rural agriculture and pastoralist programming difficult. End Summary.

DARFUR: AGRICULTURE OVERVIEW

¶2. (U) From October 3 to 14, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) field team, including the agriculture and food security advisor, visited program sites in internally displaced person (IDP) camps, host communities, and rural areas in North, West, and South Darfur to observe program implementation and sector trends.

¶3. (U) In all visited areas of Darfur, farmers and USAID/OFDA partners indicated improved access to land in 2009 compared to 2008. None of the farmers the agriculture and food security advisor spoke with indicated that lack of inputs such as seed had prevented them from planting during the current season. Some farmers did, however, indicate that the dry spell in the middle of the rainy season had caused seed failure. Most farmers indicated that preferred seed varieties were available in local markets but that access to the markets remained problematic. The harvest season begins in the coming weeks and a post-harvest assessment by the Ministry of Agriculture in conjunction with partners will offer a better indication of how successful cultivation has been.

¶4. (U) UN agency reports indicated that West Darfur will likely report a successful harvest, having received timely and sufficient rains. In both North and South Darfur, the trend is less clear. In parts of South Darfur, rains were generally adequate but some areas experienced a two week gap during a critical phase of crop production. UN agencies in North Darfur are already expressing concern due to the limited water resources for both animals and agriculture. Poor rains in North Darfur have also substantially affected pastoralists. In Dar al Salam town in North Darfur, residents reported that animals arrived far earlier than normal at local water points, indicating a lack of available water along normal routes.

LAND USE TREND TOWARD CASH CROPS

¶5. (U) There is an increasing trend of planting cash crops such as

groundnuts instead of traditional Darfur food crops such as sorghum and millet. In some cases, distribution of cash crop seeds may have supported this trend. Agriculture partners in South Darfur indicated that some farmers planted an increased land area with groundnuts. Although cash crops offer the potential for income generation, promoting food security and reducing food assistance remain priorities in Darfur. Given weak market linkages for some cash crops, households may face challenges ensuring food security if they choose to concentrate entirely on cash crops.

¶6. (U) Large camp populations have intensified the demand for resources in small areas and increased pressure on the environment, in some cases, hastening environmental degradation. Mitigation of the conflict's negative effects on the environment should be addressed as early as possible, rather than when displaced people begin to return. Even seemingly non-controversial environmental programming must be considered in the complex social and political environment of Darfur. For example, humanitarian agencies should avoid provision of trees to IDPs or returnees in cases where this activity would exacerbate already complicated land tenure issues and potentially lead to additional conflict. Solutions to land tenure issues to allow tree planting will be essential to mitigate widespread deforestation in areas surrounding camps, where camp residents have used trees for brick making, firewood, and shelter construction.

CHALLENGE: PROGRAMMING FOR PASTORALISTS

¶7. (U) While the mobile nature of the nomads' livelihoods presents a programming challenge, lack of security for humanitarian workers

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in the areas where nomads migrate presents an even greater hurdle for assistance provision. In order to provide effective assistance, further discussion between the Government of National Unity (GNU), humanitarian community, and pastoralist committees of Darfur could be beneficial. Insecurity and depletion of water and pasture resources have greatly altered traditional animal migration routes. In some cases alternate routes can lead to a greater concentration of animals at limited pasture and water sources, increasing the potential for disease outbreaks. Clustering of animals at human water points in times of water stress is also concerning due to the increased potential for contamination of safe drinking water sources.

¶8. (U) In markets in all three states, the agriculture and food security advisor observed animals in generally good condition. Diverse factors, including the end of the rainy season, the migration of animals, changes in food aid ration sizes, security issues, and access to markets all affect the price of livestock and terms of trade; thus, price trends depend on a combination of local factors.

LAND TENURE, WATER REMAIN AGRICULTURAL CHALLENGES

¶9. (SBU) Comment: Farmers throughout Darfur face challenges due to continued insecurity, lack of resolution of land tenure issues, limited access to water for agriculture, irregularity of rainfall in the region, pests and parasitic weeds, and increasing degradation of pasture and farmland. As security improves and people seek to return voluntarily to areas of origin, these issues could slow returns and make the transition from IDP to self-sustaining producer or pastoralist more challenging. The resolution of land tenure issues is of particular importance, as providing agricultural assistance to returnees before issues related to ownership and use of land are resolved could create tension between returnees and new occupants of land, leading to additional conflict.

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